



The Future of East Kent

----- MERRIL LILLEY -----

The Kent Federation of Amenity Societies holds an annual Spring Conference at a different venue each year. This year the 31st conference of the KFAS was held in Dover at St. Mary's Parish Centre on Saturday, 11th May and hosted by the Dover Society.

The Chairman of the Dover Society, Mr. Jack Woolford, is also the Chairman of the KFAS so, with his dual involvement, he was the key figure of the day and particularly anxious that the event should be a successful one. It is pleasing to report that the Chairman was not disappointed. The day was an unqualified success. Eighty-seven people attended; the weather was fine; the speeches were good; the discussion animated; the lunch excellent and the afternoon trip exceeded all expectations.

The subject of the conference was THE FUTURE OF EAST KENT, focusing on the way in which the economic stability of East Kent is closely linked to the ferry ports.

The proceedings started with coffee at ten o'clock, followed at ten-thirty by the Annual General Meeting of the KFAS. Anticipating the full programme to follow and the keen interest in the subject matter of the conference, the chairman adroitly concluded the business of the AGM in thirty minutes. He welcomed the Rt. Hon. Lord Astor as the new president, Arthur Goodburn, of the Dover Society, as Treasurer and Bob Radcliffe as a new committee member. He was pleased to report that the KFAS had 78 affiliated member societies. There were members present from Canterbury (2), Rochester (5), Chilham (2), Oaken Hill (2), Shoreham (1), Ramblers (1), Chartham (2), Hawkhurst (2), Broadstairs (2), Ramsgate (5) and the Weald of Kent (1) together with 61 members of the Dover Society.

The Kent Federation of Amenity Societies is itself also affiliated to the Kent History Federation and many other

bodies. It has its own twice-yearly publication, *Kent Matters*, and, in addition to its Spring conference, holds an Annual Conference at Wye College each September. Members were cordially invited to join this year's conference at Wye on September 14th and 15th, 1996. The Chairman's speech was followed by the Treasurer's report and the election of officers, bringing the AGM to a close by eleven o'clock.

The remainder of the morning session consisted of two addresses, the first by John Gerrard, Services General Manager of the Dover Harbour Board, entitled "The Channel Tunnel and the Ferry Ports: Can they all survive?", and the second by Ian Gill, of the East Kent Initiative, exploring the rôle of the East Kent Initiative in regenerating the local economy.

John Gerrard illustrated his talk with a number of appropriate slides, starting with a striking aerial view showing "storm clouds over the White Cliffs of Dover". In answer to his own question on the channel tunnel and the ferry ports - can they all survive? - the speaker said that the short answer is No! or, at least, not in their



TWO VIEWS OF THE DEPARTURE LOUNGE AT THE CRUISE TERMINAL





THE SPACIOUS PARKING AREA AT THE CRUISE TERMINAL

present form. There would have to be some rationalisation. He went on to trace the history and construction of the Tunnel, then to assess its present performance, quoting statistics on the gradual increase of traffic through the Tunnel through 1995 to the first quarter of 1996, showing a rise in the percentage of cars, coaches and freight traffic. Already by April 1996 there was an increase of 22% for cars and 13% for coaches compared with the figures for 1995. A reduction in tariffs was attracting more customers to the tunnel.

Next the speaker summarised the vast changes and modernisation which had taken place in the ferry industry since the late eighties, resulting in a marked improvement in customer services and increased traffic on the ferries. Many ferries made five trips per ship per day.

He then went on to talk of the the response of the Dover Harbour Board to the competition from the Tunnel, describing in detail, once again with the aid of slides, all the changes which have taken place at the Eastern Docks; the building of new berths; new signs to help drivers (including one of the longest signs in existence,

over the freight lorry check-in); and the construction of an elevated road to facilitate the flow of inward bound traffic. Since the installation of this roadway the largest ferry can be emptied in nine minutes. All operations have been speeded up. A lorry can check in in three minutes.

Other areas of the dock have been developed as the Harbour Board has diversified its operations into the importing of fresh produce. With the building of a new berth for cargo ships and extensive cargo sheds and cold storage Dover is now the fourth largest importer of fresh produce into the U.K.

Another development was to use the cargo berth, when it was free, for the occasional cruise liner and this use gradually increased. Twenty-four cruise ships used it in 1995. With greatly increased demand for cruise ship visits the Harbour Board invested £10 million in converting the Western Docks Marine Station into a fine new Cruise Terminal. This was opened on 19 April 1996 and 104 cruise calls are booked for this year. It is hoped that the economy of the town will be helped by the visiting passengers and crews.

In addition the number of summer visitors to the port has been substantially increased by another of the Harbour Board's projects, the new yacht moorings provided in the Tidal Basin at the Western Docks.

These three important developments, the cargo trade, the cruise terminal and the extra yacht moorings, will all play a crucial part in the future of the port, said the speaker. Returning to the subject of the ferry services, he said the future was uncertain. It was clear there would have to be rationalisation and it was expected that the present number of sailings of eighty-seven ferries a day should in the future reduce to a more realistic figure of about fifty-five.

The second speaker was Ian Gill of the East Kent Initiative, who spoke on the drastic effect the Channel tunnel was expected to have on jobs in East Kent. The Kent Impact Study in 1991 concluded that the economy was in a fragile state, that the projected job loss was likely to be 10,500 by 1996 and more by the year 2000. The losses were in the areas of the Kent coalfield, agriculture and the ferry industry and the present unemployment figure stood at 27,484.

The EKI was formed as a direct result of the KIS, with the objectives of encouraging investment, reducing unemployment, improving transport and infrastructure, raising the profile of the tourist industry, ensuring provision of suitable development sites and improving business opportunities in East Kent.

It was intended that the EKI, which embraces Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Sheppey, Swale and Thanet, should provide a single voice for the area, gain support from a range of organisations and help promote local and regional strategies.

Already the EKI had achieved much for the area, securing Assisted Area Status; obtaining European funding and funding from The Single Regeneration Budget Fund; embarking on various programmes such as SME, KONVER and PESCA; contributing valuable work in rais-

ing skill levels, helping school leavers, introducing training packages and providing redundancy counselling, investigating site development and investing in tourism.

As the first speaker had started with a question, the second speaker ended with one. How can we kick-start East Kent?

Following the two addresses the morning ended with a lively question and answer session, in which the two speakers fielded, to the best of their ability, a dozen or more pertinent and thought-provoking questions from the floor. The Chairman thanked speakers and audience and reminded all that there was only an hour in which to enjoy the excellent lunch before proceeding to the afternoon tour of the Port of Dover.

At two o'clock two large coaches left from Pencester Gardens for a two-hour tour, the time to be divided equally between the Eastern and the Western Docks, one coach proceeding east and the other west.

At the Eastern Docks the tour included the Port Control building on the Eastern Arm, dealing with all sea traffic, then the Control building within the port area, controlling all movements on land. This part of the trip need not be described in detail here as it is already covered elsewhere in the *Newsletter*. (See the article by John Bartlett on a separate visit to Port control).

At the Western Docks the coach party visited the Cruise Terminal- a treat indeed to be some of the first local visitors to be allowed a glimpse inside. As there was a cruise ship in port each visitor was issued with a special red sticker to enable the party to pass through port security. We passed beneath the entrance canopy, through the check-in hall, up the gleaming escalator to the departure lounges, exclaiming as we went on the fantastic transformation of the old Marine Station into this attractive and spacious international cruise location. Passengers embarking at Dover pass this way and pause in

the comfortable lounge to view the magnificent arching spines of the old station and the re-furbished splendour of the Southern Railway's Memorial from the Second World War.

By chance we met a couple of cruise passengers from Michigan, USA, returning to the ship after walking into Dover. We were anxious to know their impressions of the town. Yes, they thought it was a nice little town to visit. They had walked past the Grand Shaft and wanted to go in but it was closed. Yes, they realised they should have seen the castle, but there was

so little time. They had been given some leaflets about Dover about an hour before disembarking but hadn't read them carefully. They'd enjoyed their visit, had lunch at Dickens Corner, bought some very good greetings cards from The Gift Box in Bench Street, one in particular for a Golden Wedding. They thought that all the people were very friendly. So we left them to resume their cruise and returned to our coach.

Back to St. Mary's Hall for tea and thank you speeches to all who had contributed to this superlatively successful day.

The Official Opening of the Cruise Terminal

More than 200 guests attended the official opening of the Cruise Terminal on 20th June 1996. Dover Harbour Board Chairman, John Maltby announced that already 108 cruise liners had booked for 1997, making Dover the busiest cruise line port in the UK.

The Cunard *Royal Viking Sun* was in port for the opening and guests had a tour of the vessel and lunch on board, before it

departed for a fourteen-day Norwegian cruise.

Guests were greeted by Jonathan Sloggett, Managing Director of Dover Harbour Board and the opening was performed by Peter Ward Chairman and Chief Executive of Cunard. He unveiled a wall plaque set between two photographs, one of the Golden Arrow and the other of *The Royal Viking Sun*.

The Grand Shaft — — — — — TERRY SUTTON

One of Dover's best known tourist attractions, the Grand Shaft, is open again following restoration. The perpendicular shaft through the cliffs, linking Snargate Street with the Western Heights, is open every afternoon (except Mondays) between two and five.

The re-opening ceremony was performed by Brigadier David Godsall, Deputy Constable of Dover Castle, when a kilted nineteenth cent. re-enactment group, the 42nd Highlanders, mounted guard and gave a demonstration of musketry. firing.

The shaft was built during the threat of a Napoleonic invasion and the triple stair-

way down through the cliff was designed to provide a surprise route by which British troops could emerge from their Western Heights barracks to swoop on any French bridgehead, cutting off hopes of reinforcements. It was all a complete waste of money because no invasion came.

But the three spiral staircases, each of 140 steps, leading to another fifty-nine steps in the open air, for many years provided a route for garrison troops as they headed for the fleshpots of Snargate Street and the rest of Dover. How they managed to climb back afterwards leaves a lot to the imagination! It's quite a climb!